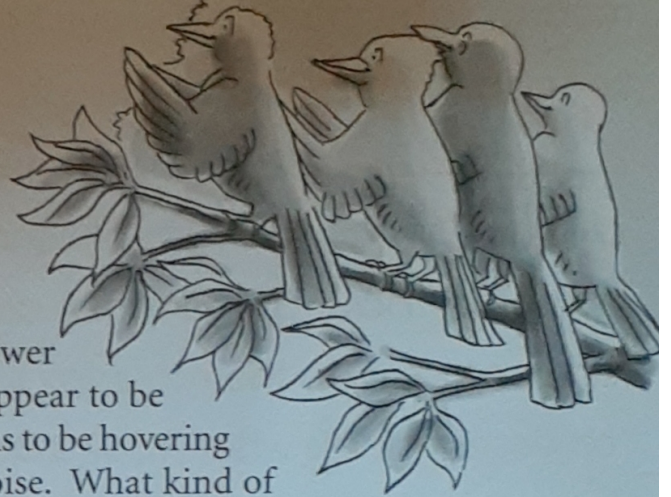




The Hummingbird – a Unique Flyer



Have you ever seen a tiny bird flitting from flower to flower? The wings move so fast that they appear to be just a blur. The bird appears not to be flying and seems to be hovering over the flowers. You hear a buzzing, humming noise. What kind of bird is it? You wonder. You have just seen a hummingbird!

Hummingbirds are the tiniest birds in the world. They are usually not more than 20 grams, though some can be as little as two grams! Their wings are quite long and pointy, which rotate rather than flap. This allows them to approach flowers in a way most other birds cannot. They move in this unique way to get very close to flowers for their food: besides feeding on insects like spiders, hummingbirds feed on nectar just like bees do.

This type of flying requires a lot of effort – the wings of a hummingbird beat up to 200 times per second! They can also fly up to 75 kilometres per hour. Because of this, hummingbirds need a lot of food each day to get their energy. They eat as much as half their body weight in nectar and insects every day! This is why the birds must spend most of their time flying around looking for food. Their feet are not well-developed as a result, since they are not for walking but for perching briefly on branches.

There are approximately 300 different types of hummingbird, all inhabiting the western hemisphere from Canada down to Argentina. Canada and the United States are home to about 16 species, while the majority of hummingbirds live in the more tropical areas of Central and South America. Hummingbirds live for as long as five or six years in the wild, and many of them are migratory. For example, the ruby-throated hummingbird migrates across the Gulf of Mexico to take advantage of the warmer winters down south.